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SMITH

LETTER TO ARCHDEACON
SINGLETON ON THE
ECCLESIASTICAL
COMMISSION





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A LETTER

TO

ARCHDEACON SINGLETON,

ON THE

Ecclesiastical Commission,

BY

THE REV. SYDNEY SMITH.

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A LETTER
TO
ARCHDEACON SINGLETON,
ON THE
ECCLESIASTICAL COMMISSION.

MY DEAR SIR,

As you do me the honour to ask my opinion respecting the constitution* and proceedings of the Ecclesiastical Commission, and of their conduct to the Dignitaries of the Church, I shall write to you without any reserve upon this subject.

The first thing which excited my surprize, was the Constitution of the Commission. As the reform was to comprehend every branch of Churchmen, Bishops, Dignitaries, and Parochial Clergymen, I cannot but think it would have been much more advisable to have added to the Commission some members of the two lower orders of the Church—they would have supplied that partial knowledge which appears in so many of the proceedings of the Commissioners to have been wanting—they would have attended to those interests (not episcopal) which appear to have been so completely overlooked—and they would have screened the Com-

* The original Commission (excluding the Ministers of State and the Archbishops) was the Bishop of London, diluted with some watery additions, unless the Earl of Harrowby would allow me to consider him as that admirable plant of the *Monandria Monogynia* class, the *Radix Zingiberis* of the Pharmacopoeia ; the *Zungebel* of the Persians, administered to the failing stomachs of the senile nobility by the most polished of human physicians, the *Machaon* of Majesty, and the *Podalirius* of power.

mission from those charges of injustice, and partiality which are now so generally brought against them. There can be no charm in the name of Bishop—the man who was a Curate yesterday is a Bishop to-day. There are many Prebendaries, many Rectors, and many Vicars, who would have come to the Reform of the Church with as much integrity, wisdom, and vigour, as any Bishop on the Bench ; and I believe, with a much stronger recollection that all the orders of the Church were not to be sacrificed to the highest ; and that to make their work respectable, and lasting, it should in all, (even its minutest provisions), be founded upon justice.

All the interests of the Church in the Commutation of Tithes are entrusted to one parochial Clergyman* ; and I have no doubt, from what I hear of him, that they will be well protected. Why could not one or two such men have been added to the Commission, and a general impression been created, that Government in this momentous change had a parental feeling for all orders of men whose interests might be affected by it ? A Ministry may laugh at this, and think if they cultivate Bishops, that they may treat the other orders of the Church with contempt, and neglect ; but I say, that to create a general impression of justice, if it be not what common honesty requires from any Ministry, is what common sense points out to

* The Rev. Mr. Jones is the Commissioner appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury to watch over the interests of the Church.

them. It is strength, and duration—it is the only power which is worth having—in the struggle of parties it gives victory, and is remembered, and goes down to other times.

A mixture of different orders of Clergy in the Commission, would at least have secured a decent attention to the representations of all ; for of seven communications made to the Commission by Cathedrals, and involving very serious representations respecting high interests, six were totally disregarded, and the receipt of the papers not even acknowledged.

I cannot help thinking that the Commissioners have done a great deal too much. Reform of the Church was absolutely necessary — it cannot be avoided, and ought not to be postponed ; but I would have found out what really gave offence, have applied a remedy, removed the nuisance, and done no more. I would not have operated so largely on an old, and (I fear) a decay-ing building. I would not, in days of such strong political excitement, and amidst such a disposition to universal change, have done one thing more than was absolutely necessary to remove the odium which was excited against the Establishment, which was, in fact, the only sensible reason for issuing any Commission at all, and the means which I took to effect this, should have agreed as much as possible with institutions already established. For instance, the public were disgusted with the spectacle of rich Prebendaries enjoying large incomes, and doing little, or nothing for them. The real

remedy for this would have been (according to the plan so properly recommended by the Church of Canterbury), to have combined wealth, and labour and as each of the present Prebendaries fell off, to have annexed the stall to some large, and populous parish. A Prebendary of Canterbury, or of St. Paul's, in his present state, may make the Church unpopular; but place him as Rector of a Parish, with 8000 or 9000 people, and in a Benefice of little, or no value, he works for his wealth, and the odium is removed. In like manner the Prebends, which are not the property of Residentiaries, might have been annexed to the smallest livings of the neighbourhood, where the Prebendal estate was situated. The interval which has elapsed since the first furious demand for reform, would have enabled the Commissioners to adopt a scheme of much greater moderation than might perhaps have been possible at the first outbreak of popular indignation against the Church; and this sort of distribution would have given much more general satisfaction than the plan adopted by the Commissioners; for though money, in the estimation of philosophers, has no ear mark, it has a very deep one in the opinion of the multitude. The riches of the Church of Durham were most hated in the neighbourhood of Durham; and there such changes as I have pointed out would have been most gladly received, and would have conciliated the greatest favour to the Church. The people of Kent cannot see why their Kentish Estates, given to the Cathedral of Canterbury, are to augment livings in Cornwall.

The Citizens of London see some of their Ministers starving in the city, and the profits of the extinguished Prebends sent into Northumberland. These feelings may be very unphilosophical, but they are the feelings of the mass ; and to the feelings of the mass of the people the Reforms of the Church ought to be directed. In this way the evil would have been corrected where it was most seen and noticed. All patronage would have been left as it was. One order of the Church would not have plundered the other. Nor would all the Cathedrals in England have been subjected to the unconciliating empire, and unwearied energy of one man.

Instead of this quiet, and cautious mode of proceeding, all is change, fusion, and confusion. New Bishops, new Dioceses, confiscated Prebends, —Clergymen changing Bishops, and Bishops Clergymen—mitres in Manchester, Gloucester turned into Bristol. Such a scene of revolution, and commutation as has not been seen since the days of Ireton, and Cromwell ! and the singularity is, that all this has been effected by men selected from their age, their dignity, and their known principles, and from whom the considerate part of the community expected all the caution, and calmness which these high requisites seemed to promise, and ought to have secured.

The plea of making a fund is utterly untenable —the great object was not to make a fund ; and there is the mistake into which the Commission have fallen : the object was not to add £10 or £20 per annum to a thousand small livings, and to

diminish inequalities in a ratio so trifling that the public will hardly notice it; a very proper thing to do if higher interests were not sacrificed to it, but the great object was to remove the causes of hatred from the Church, by lessening such incomes as those of Canterbury, Durham, and London, exorbitantly, and absurdly great--bymaking idleness work—and by these means to lessen the envy of laymen. It is impossible to make a fund which will raise the smaller livings of the Church into any thing like a decent support for those who possess them. The whole income of the Church, episcopal, prebendal, and parochial, divided among the Clergy, would not give to each Clergyman an income equal to that which is enjoyed by the upper domestic of a great nobleman. The method in which the Church has been paid, and must continue to be paid, is by unequal divisions. All the enormous changes which the Commission is making will produce a very trifling difference in the inequality, while it will accustom more and more those enemies of the Church, who are studying under their Right Rev. Masters, to the boldest revolutions in Ecclesiastical affairs. Out of 10,478 Benefices there are 297 of about £40 per annum value; 1,629 at about £75, and 1,602 at about £125; to raise all these benefices to £200 per annum, would require an annual sum of £371,293; and upon 2,878 of those Benefices there are no houses; and upon 1,728 no houses fit for residence. What difference in the apparent inequality of the Church would this sum of £371,293 produce, if it could be raised, or in

what degree would it lessen the odium which that inequality creates? the case is utterly hopeless; and yet with all their confiscations the Commissioners are so far from being able to raise the annual sum of £371,000, that the utmost they expect to gain is £130,000 per annum.

It seems a paradoxical statement, but the fact is, that the respectability of the Church as well as of the Bar, is almost entirely preserved by the unequal division of their revenues. A Bar of one hundred lawyers travel the Northern Circuit, enlightening provincial ignorance, curing local partialities, diffusing knowledge, and dispensing justice in their route; it is quite certain, that all they gain is not equal to all that they spend; if the profits were equally divided there would not be six and eightpence for each person, and there would be no Bar at all. At present, the success of the leader animates them all—each man hopes to be a Scarlett or a Brougham—and takes out his ticket in a lottery by which the mass must infallibly lose, trusting (as mankind are so apt to do) to his good fortune, and believing that the prize is reserved for him, disappointment, and defeat for others. So it is with the Clergy; the whole income of the Church, if equally divided, would be about £250 for each minister. Who would go into the Church and spend £1,200 or £1,500 upon his education, if such were the highest remuneration he could ever look to? At present, men are tempted into the Church by the prizes of the Church, and bring into

that Church a great deal of capital which enables them to live in decency, supporting themselves, not with the money of the public, but with their own money, which, but for this temptation, would have been carried into some retail trade. The offices of the Church would then fall down to men little less coarse, and ignorant than agricultural labourers—the clergyman of the parish would soon be seen in the squire's kitchen; and all this would take place in a country where poverty is infamous!

In fact, nothing can be more unjust, and idle than the reasoning of many laymen upon Church matters. You choose to have an Establishment—God forbid you should choose otherwise! and you wish to have men of decent manners, and good education as the Ministers of that Establishment: all this is very right; but are you willing to pay them as such men ought to be paid? Are you willing to pay to each Clergyman, confining himself to one spot, and giving up all his time to the care of one parish, a salary of £500 per annum? To do this would require three millions to be added to the present Revenues of the Church; and such an expenditure is impossible! What then remains if you will have a Clergy and will not pay them equitably, and separately, than to pay them unequally and by lottery? and yet this very inequality, which secures to you a respectable Clergy upon the most economical terms, is considered by laymen as a gross abuse. It is an abuse, however,

which they have not the spirit to extinguish by increased munificence to their Clergy, nor justice to consider as the only other method by which all the advantages of a respectable Establishment can be procured ; but they use it at the same time as a topic for sarcasm, and a source of economy.

This it will be said is a Mammonish view of the subject ; it is so, but those who make this objection, forget the immense effect which Mammon produces upon religion itself. Shall the gospel be preached by men paid by the state ? shall these men be taken from the lower orders and be meanly paid ? shall they be men of learning and education ? and shall there be some magnificent endowments to allure such men into the Church ? Which of these methods is the best for diffusing the rational doctrines of Christianity ? not in the age of the apostles, not in the abstract, timeless, nameless placeless land of the philosophers, but in the year, 1837, in the porter-brewing, cotton-spinning, tallow melting kingdom of Great Britain, bursting with opulence, and flying from poverty as the greatest of human evils. Many different answers may be given to these questions, but they are questions which do not end in Mammon, but have a powerful bearing on real religion, and deserve the deepest consideration from its disciples, and friends. Let the comforts of the Clergy go for nothing. Consider their state only as religion is affected by it. If upon this principle I am forced to allot to some, an opulence which my clever friend the Examiner would pro-

nounce to be unapostolical, I cannot help it; I must take this people with all their follies, and prejudices, and circumstances, and carve out an establishment best suited for them, however unfit for early Christianity in barren, and conquered Judea.

Not only will this measure of the Commission bring into the Church a lower, and worse educated set of men, but it will have a tendency to make the Clergy fanatical. You will have a set of ranting, raving, Pastors, who will wage war against all the innocent pleasures of life, vie with each other in extravagance of zeal, and plague your heart out with their nonsense, and absurdity; cribbage must be played in caverns, and sixpenny whist take refuge in the howling wilderness. In this way low men doomed to hopeless poverty, and galled by contempt, will endeavour to force themselves into station, and significance.

There is an awkward passage in the memorial of the Church of Canterbury, which deserves some consideration from him to whom it is directed. The Archbishop of Canterbury, at his consecration, takes a solemn oath that he will maintain the rights and liberties of the Church of Canterbury; as Chairman, however of the New Commission, he seizes the patronage of that Church, takes two-thirds of its Revenues, and abolishes two-thirds of its Members. That there is an answer to this I am very willing to believe, but I cannot at present find out what it is; and this attack upon the Revenues, and Members of

Canterbury is not obedience to an Act of Parliament, but the very Act of Parliament which takes away is recommended, drawn up, and signed by the person who has sworn he will never take away ; and this little apparent inconsistency is not confined to the Archbishop of Canterbury, but is shared equally by all the Bishop Commissioners, who have all (unless I am grievously mistaken,) taken similar oaths for the preservation of their respective Chapters. It would be more easy to see our way out of this little embarrassment, if some of the embarrassed had not unfortunately, in the parliamentary debates on the Catholic Question, laid the greatest stress upon the King's oath, applauded the sanctity of the monarch to the skies, rejected all comments, called for the oath in its plain meaning, and attributed the safety of the English Church to the solemn vow made by the King at the altar to the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, and the other Bishops. I should be very sorry if this were not placed on a clear footing, as fools will be imputing to our Church the *pia et religiosa Calliditas*, which is so commonly brought against the Catholics.

Urbem quam dicunt Romam, Melibœe, putavi
Stultus ego huic nostræ similem.

The words of Henry VIII , in endowing the Cathedral of Canterbury, are thus given in the translation. “ We therefore, dedicating the aforesaid close, site, circle, and precinct to the honour and glory of the holy and undivided Trinity, Father, Son, and

Holy Spirit, have decreed that a certain Cathedral and Metropolitan Church, with one Dean, Presbyter, and twelve Prebendaries Presbyters; these verily and for ever to serve Almighty God shall be created, set up, settled, and established; and the same aforesaid Cathedral, and Metropolitan Church with one Dean, Presbyter, and twelve Prebendaries Presbyters, with other Ministers necessary for divine worship, by the tenor of these presents in reality, and plenitude of force, we do create, set up, settle, and establish, and do command to be established and to be in perpetuity, and inviolably maintained and upheld by these presents." And this is the Church, the rights and liberties of which the Archbishop at his consecration swears to maintain. Nothing can be more ill-natured among politicians, than to look back into Hansard's debates, to see what has been said by particular men upon particular occasions, and to contrast such speeches with present opinions—and therefore I forbear to introduce some inviting passages upon taking oaths in their plain and obvious sense, both in debates on the Catholic Question and upon that fatal and *Mezentian* oath which binds the Irish to the English Church.

It is quite absurd to see how all the Cathedrals are to be trimmed to an exact *Procrustes* pattern—*quieta movere* is the motto of the Commission: there is to be every where a Dean, and four Residentiaries; but St. Paul's, and Lincoln have at present only three Residentiaries, and a Dean, who officiates in his turn

as a Canon :—a fourth must be added to each. Why ? nobody wants more Prebendaries ; St. Paul's and Lincoln go on very well as they are. It is not for the lack of Prebendaries that the Church of England is unpopular, but for their idleness ; but in the lust of reforming, the Commission cut, and patch property as they would cut figures in pasteboard. This little piece of wanton change, however, gives to two of the Bishops, who are Commissioners as well as Bishops, patronage of a thousand a year each ; and though I am willing not to consider this as the cause of the recommendation, yet I must observe it is not very common that the same persons should bring in the verdict and receive the profits of the suit. No other Archdeacons are paid in such a manner, and no other Bishops out of the Commission have received such a bonus.*

I must express my surprize that nothing in this Commission of Bishops, either in the Bill which has passed, or in the Report which preceded it, is said of the duties of Bishops. A Bishop is not now forced by law to be in his diocese, or to attend his duty in Parliament—he may be entirely absent from both ; nor are there wanting instances within these six years where such has been the case. It would have been very easy to have placed the repairs of Episcopal Palaces (as the concurrent leases of Bishops are placed) under the superintendence of Deans, and Chapters ; but though

* This extravagant pay of Archdeacons is taken, remember, from that fund for the augmentation of small Livings, for the establishment of which all the divisions and confiscations have been made.

the Bishops' bill was accompanied by another bill, containing the strictest enactments for the residence of the Clergy, and some very arbitrary, and unjust rules for the repair of their houses, it did not appear upon the face of the law that the Bishops had any such duties to perform; and yet I remember the case of a Bishop, dead not six years ago, who was scarcely ever seen in the House of Lords, or in his diocese; and I remember well also the indignation with which the inhabitants of a great Cathedral Town spoke of the conduct of another Bishop (now also deceased) who not only never entered his palace, but turned his horses into the garden. When I mention these instances, I am not setting myself up as the satirist of Bishops. I think upon the whole, they do their duty in a very exemplary manner; but they are not as the late bills would have us to suppose, *impeccable*. The Church Commissioners should not have suffered their reports and recommendations to paint the other branches of the Church as such slippery transgressing mortals, and to leave the world to imagine that Bishops may be safely trusted to their own goodness without enactment or controul.

This squabble about patronage is said to be disgraceful. Those who mean to be idle, and insolent, because they are at peace, may look out of the window and say, "This is a disgraceful squabble between Bishops and Chapters;" but those who mean to be just, should ask, *Who begins?* the *real* disgrace of the squabble is in the attack, and not in the defence. If any man puts his hand

into my pocket to take my property, am I disgraced if I prevent him? Churchmen are ready enough to be submissive to their superiors; but were they to submit to a spoliation so gross, accompanied with ignominy, and degradation, and to bear all this in submissive silence? to be accused of Nepotism by Nepotists, who were praising themselves indirectly by the accusation, and benefiting themselves directly by the confiscation founded on it?—the real disgrace would have been to have submitted to this: and men are to be honoured, not disgraced, who come forth, contrary to their usual habits, to oppose those masters, whom, in common seasons, they would willingly obey; but who, in this matter, have tarnished their dignity, and forgotten what they owe to themselves and to us.

It is a very singular thing that the Law always suspects Judges, and never suspects Bishops. If there is any way in which the partialities of the Judge may injure laymen, the subject is fenced round with all sorts of jealousies, and enactments, and prohibitions—all partialities are guarded against, and all propensities watched. Where Bishops are concerned, Acts of Parliament are drawn up for beings who can never possibly be polluted by pride, prejudice, passion, or interest. Not otherwise would be the case with Judges, if they, like the heads of the Church, legislated for themselves.

Then comes the question of patronage: can any thing be more flagrantly unjust, than that the patronage of Cathedrals should be taken away and conferred

upon the Bishops ? I do not want to go into a long and tiresome history of Episcopal Nepotism, but it is notorious to all, that Bishops confer their patronage upon their sons, and sons-in-law, and all their relations ; and it is really quite monstrous in the face of the world, who see this every day, and every hour, to turn round upon Deans, and Chapters and to say to them, “ We are credibly informed that there are instances in your Chapters where preferment has not been given to the most learned men you can find, but to the sons and brothers of some of the Prebendaries. These things must not be—we must take these Benefices into our own keeping ;” and this is the language of men swarming themselves with sons, and daughters, and who, in enumerating the advantages of their stations, have always spoken of the opportunities of providing for their families as the greatest and most important. It is, I admit, the duty of every man, and of every body, to present the best man that can be found to any living of which he is the Patron ; but if this duty has been neglected, it has been neglected by Bishops quite as much as by Chapters ; and no man can open the “ Clerical Guide” and read two pages of it, without seeing that the Bench of Bishops are the last persons from whom any remedy of this evil is to be expected.

The legislature has not always taken the same view of the comparative trust-worthiness of Bishops and Chapters as is taken by the Commission. Bishops’ leases for years are for twenty-one years, renewable every seven. When seven years

are expired, if the present tenant will not renew, the Bishop may grant a concurrent lease. How does his lordship act on such occasions? He generally asks two years income for the renewal, when Chapters, not having the privilege of granting such concurring leases, ask only a year and a half; and if the Bishop's price is not given, he puts a son or a daughter, or a trustee, into the estate, and the price of the lease deferred is money saved for his family. But unfair, and exorbitant terms may be asked by his lordship, and the tenant may be unfairly dispossessed—therefore, the legislature enacts that all those concurrent leases must be countersigned by the Dean, and Chapter of the diocese—making them the safeguards against Episcopal rapacity; and, as I hear from others, not making them so in vain. These sort of laws do not exactly correspond with the relative views taken of both parties by the Ecclesiastical Commission. This view of Chapters is of course overlooked by a Commission of Bishops, just as all mention of bridles would be omitted in a meeting of horses; but in this view Chapters might be made eminently useful. In what profession, too, is there no gradations? Why is the Church of England to be nothing but a collection of Beggars and Bishops—the right reverend Dives in the palace, and Lazarus in orders at the gate, doctored by dogs, and comforted with crumbs?

But to take away the patronage of existing Prebendaries is objectionable for another class of reasons.

If it is right to take away the patronage of my Cathedral and to give it to the Bishop, it is at least unjust to do so with my share of it during my life. Society have a right to improve, or to do what they think an improvement, but then they have no right to do so suddenly, and hastily to my prejudice! After securing to me certain possessions by one hundred statutes past in six hundred years—after having clothed me in fine garments, and conferred upon me pompous names, they have no right to turn round upon me all of a sudden and to say, you are not a Dean nor a Canon-Residentiary, but a vagabond and an out-cast, and a morbid excrescence upon society. This would not be a reform, but the grossest tyranny and oppression. If a man cannot live under the canopy of ancient law, where is he safe? how can he see his way, or lay out his plan of life?

“*Dubitant homines serere atque impendere curas.*”

You tolerated for a century the wicked traffic in slaves, legislated for that species of property, encouraged it by premiums, defended it in your Courts of Justice—West Indians bought, and sold, trusting (as Englishmen always ought to trust) in Parliaments. Women went to the altar, promised that they should be supported by that property; and children were born to it, and young men were educated with it: but God touched the hearts of the English people, and they would have no slaves. The scales fell from their eyes, and they saw the monstrous wickedness of the traffic; but then they said, and said magnificently, to the West Indians,

“ We mean to become wiser and better, but not at your expense ; the loss shall be ours, and we will not involve you in ruin, because we are ashamed of our former cruelties, and have learnt a better lesson of humanity, and wisdom.” And this is the way in which improving nations ought to act, and this is the distinction between reform, and revolution.

Justice is not changed by the magnitude, or minuteness of the subject. The old Cathedrals have enjoyed their patronage for seven hundred years, and the new ones since the time of Henry the Eighth ; which latter period even gives a much longer possession than ninety-nine out of a hundred of the legislators, who are called upon to plunder us, can boast of for their own estates. And these rights, thus sanctioned, and hallowed by time, are torn from their present possessors without the least warning, or preparation, in the midst of all that fever of change which has seized upon the people, and which frightens men to the core of their hearts ; and this spoliation is made, not by low men rushing into the plunder of the Church and State, but by men of admirable, and unimpeached character in all the relations of life—not by rash men of new politics, but by the ancient conservators of ancient law—by the Archbishops and Bishops of the land, high official men, invented and created, and put in palaces to curb the lawless changes, and the mutations, and the madness of mankind ; and to crown the whole, the ludicrous is added to the unjust, and what they take from the

other branches of the Church they confer upon *themselves*.

Never dreaming of such sudden revolutions as these, a Prebendary brings up his son to the Church, and spends a large sum of money in his education, which perhaps he can ill afford. His hope is (wicked wretch!) that according to the established custom of the body to which he, (immoral man!) belongs, the Chapter will (when his turn arrives), if his son be of fair attainments and good character, attend to his nefarious recommendation, and confer the living upon the young man; and in an instant all his hopes are destroyed, and he finds his preferment seized upon, under the plea of public good, by a stronger Churchman than himself. I can call this by no other name than that of tyranny, and oppression. I know very well that this is not the theory of patronage; but who does better?—do individual patrons?—do Colleges who give in succession?—and as for Bishops, lives there the manso weak, and foolish, so little observant of the past, as to believe (when this tempest of purity and perfection has blown over) that the name of Blomfield will not figure in those benefices from which the names of Copleston, Blomberg, Tate, and Smith, have been so virtuously excluded? I have no desire to make odious comparisons between the purity of one set of patrons and another, but they are forced upon me by the injustice of the Commissioners. I must either make such com-

parisons, or yield up, without remonstrance, those rights to which I am fairly entitled.

It may be said that the Bishops will do better in future ; that now the *public eye* is upon them, they will be shamed into a more lofty and antinepotic spirit ; but, if the argument of past superiority is given up, and the hope of future amendment resorted to, why may we not improve as well as our masters ? but the Commission say, “ These excellent men (meaning themselves) have promised to do better, and we have an implicit confidence in their word : we must have your patronage.” In the meantime we are ready to promise as well as the Bishops.

With regard to that common newspaper phrase *the public eye*—there’s nothing (as the Bench well know) more wandering and slippery than the *public eye*. In five years hence the public eye will no more see what description of men are promoted by Bishops, than it will see what Doctors of Law are promoted by the Turkish Uhlema ; and at the end of this period (such is the example set by the Commission), the *public eye* turned in every direction may not be able to see any Bishops at all.

In many instances, Chapters are better patrons than Bishops, because their preferment is not given exclusively to one species of Incumbents. I have a diocese now in my private eye which has undergone the following changes. The first of three Bishops whom I remember was a man of careless easy temper, and how patronage went in those early days may be conjectured by the following letters, which are not his, but serve to illustrate a system

THE BISHOP TO LORD A——

MY DEAR LORD,

I have noticed with great pleasure the behaviour of your Lordship's second son, and am most happy to have it in my power to offer to him the living of * * * He will find it of considerable value ; and there is, I understand, a very good house upon it, &c. &c.

This is to confer a living upon a man of real merit out of the family ; into which family, apparently sacrificed to the public good, the living is brought back by the second letter.—

THE SAME TO THE SAME A YEAR AFTER.

MY DEAR LORD,

Will you excuse the liberty I take in soliciting promotion for my grandson ? He is an officer of great skill and gallantry, and can bring the most ample testimonials from some of the best men in the profession : the *Arethusa* frigate is, I understand, about to be commissioned ; and if, &c. &c.

Now I am not saying that hundreds of Prebendaries have not committed such enormous, and stupendous crimes as this (a declaration which will fill the Whig Cabinet with horror) ; all that I mean to contend for is, that such is the practice of Bishops quite as much as it is of inferior Patrons.

The second Bishop was a decided enemy of Calvinistical doctrines, and no Clergyman so tainted had the slightest chance of preferment in his diocese.

The third Bishop could endure no man whose

principles were not strictly Calvinistic, and who did not give to the Articles that kind of interpretation. Now here were a great mass of Clergy naturally alive to the emoluments of their profession, and not knowing which way to look or stir, because they depended so entirely upon the will of one person. Not otherwise is it with a very Whig Bishop, or a very Tory Bishop ; but the worst case is that of a superannuated Bishop ; here the preferment is given away, and must be given away, by wives and daughters, or by sons, or by butlers, perhaps, and valets, and the poor dying Patron's paralytic hand is guided to the signature of papers, the contents of which he is utterly unable to comprehend. In all such cases as these, the superiority of Bishops as Patrons will not assist that violence which the Commissioners have committed upon the patronage of Cathedrals.

I never heard that Cathedrals had sold the patronage of their preferment ; such a practice, however, is not quite unknown among the higher orders of the Church. When the Archbishop of Canterbury consecrates an inferior Bishop, he marks some piece of preferment in the gift of the Bishop as his own. This is denominated an *option* ; and when the preferment falls, it is not only in the gift of the Archbishop, if he is alive, but in the gift of his representatives if he is not. It is an absolute chattel, which, like any other chattel, is part of the Archbishop's assets ; and if he died in debt, might be taken, and sold,

for the benefit of his creditors—and within the memory of man such options have been publicly sold by auction—and if the present Archbishop of Canterbury were to die in debt to-morrow, such might be the fate of his options. What Archbishop Moore did with his options I do not know, but the late Archbishop Sutton very handsomely and properly left them to the present—a bequest, however, which would not have prevented such options from coming to the hammer, if Archbishop Sutton had not cleared off, before his death, those incumbrances which at one period of his life sat so heavily upon him.

What the present Archbishop means to do with them, I am not informed. They are not alluded to in the Church Returns, though they must be worth some thousand pounds. The Commissioners do not seem to know of their existence—at least they are profoundly silent on the subject; and the Bill which passed through Parliament in the summer for the regulation of the Emoluments of Bishops, does not make the most distant allusion to them. When a parallel was drawn between two species of patrons—which ended in the confiscation of the patronage of Cathedrals—when two Archbishops helped to draw the parallel, and profited by the parallel, I have a perfect right to state this corrupt and unabolished practice of their own sees—a practice which I never heard charged against Deans, and Chapters.

I do not mean to imply, in the most remote de-

gree, that either of the present Archbishops have sold their options, or ever thought of it. Purer and more high-minded gentlemen do not exist, nor men more utterly incapable of doing any thing unworthy of their high station; and I am convinced the Archbishop of Canterbury* will imitate or exceed the munificence of his predecessor: but when twenty-four public bodies are to be despoiled of their patronage, we must look not only to present men, but historically, to see how it has been administered in times of old, and in times also recently past; and to remember, that at this moment, when Bishops are set up as the most admirable dispensers of patronage—as the only persons fit to be intrusted with it—as Marvels, for whom law and justice, and ancient possessions, ought to be set aside, that this patronage (very valuable because selected from the whole diocese) of the two heads of the Church is liable to all the accidents of succession—that it may fall into the hands of a superannuated wife, of a profligate son, of a weak daughter, or a rapacious creditor—that it may be brought to the hammer, and publicly bid for at an auction, like all the other chattels of the palace; and that such have been the indignities to

* The options of the Archbishop of York are comparatively trifling. I never heard, at any period, that they had been sold; but they remain, like those of Canterbury, in the absolute possession of the Archbishop's representatives after his death. I will answer for it that the present Archbishop will do every thing with them which becomes his high station and high character. They ought to be abolished by Act of Parliament.

which this optional patronage has been exposed, from the earliest days of the Church to this moment. Truly, men who live in houses of glass (especially where the panes are so large) ought not to fling stones; or if they do, they should be specially careful at whose head they are flung.

And then the patronage which is not seized—the patronage which the Chapter is allowed to present to its own body—may be divided without their consent. Can any thing be more thoroughly lawless, or unjust than this—that my patronage during my life shall be divided without my consent? How do my rights during my life differ from those of a lay patron, who is tenant for life? and upon what principle of justice, or common sense is his patronage protected from the Commissioners' dividing power to which mine is subjected? That one can sell, and the other cannot sell, the next presentation, would be bad reasoning if it were good law; but it is not law, for an Ecclesiastical Corporation, aggregate or sole, can sell a next presentation as legally as a lay life-tenant can do. They have the same power of selling as laymen, but they never do so; that is, they dispense their patronage with greater propriety, and delicacy, which, in the estimate of the Commissioners, seems to make their right weaker, and the reasons for taking it away more powerful.

Not only are Laymen guarded by the same act which gives the power of dividing livings to the Commissioners, but Bishops are also guarded. The

Commissioners may divide the livings of Chapters without their consent ; but before they can touch the living of a Bishop, his consent must be obtained. It seems after a few of those examples, to become a little clearer, and more intelligible why the appointment of any other Ecclesiastics than Bishops was so disagreeable to the Bench.

The reasoning then is this : if a good living is vacant in the patronage of a Chapter, they will only think of conferring it on one of their body or their friends. If such a living falls to the gift of a Bishop, he will totally overlook the interests of his sons, and daughters, and divide the living into small portions for the good of the public ; and with these sort of anilities, Whig leaders, whose interest it is to lull the Bishops into a reform, pretend to be satisfied ; and upon this intolerable nonsense they are not ashamed to justify spoliation.

A division is set up between public, and private patronage, and it is pretended that one is holden in trust for the public, the other is private property. This is mere theory—a slight film thrown over convenient injustice. Henry VIII. gave to the Duke of Bedford much of his patronage. Roger de Hoveden gave to the Church of St. Paul's much of their patronage before the Russells were in existence. The duke has the legal power to give his preferment to whom he pleases—so have we. We are both under the same moral, and religious restraint to administer that patronage properly—

the trust is precisely the same to both ; and if the public good requires it, the power of dividing livings without the consent of patrons should be given in all instances, and not confined as a mark of infamy to Cathedrals alone. This is not the real reason of the difference ; Bishops are the active Members of the Commission—they do not choose that their own patronage should be meddled with, and they know that the Laity would not allow for a moment that their livings should be pulled to pieces by Bishops ; and that if such a proposal were made, there would be more danger of the Bishop being pulled to pieces than the living. The real distinction is between the weak, and the strong—between those who have power to resist encroachment, and those who have not. This is the reason why we are selected for experiment, and so it is with all the bill from beginning to end. There is purple and fine linen in every line of it.

Another strong objection to the dividing power of the Commission is this. According to the printed bill brought forward last session, if the living is not taken by some members of the body, it lapses to the Bishop. Suppose then the same person to be Bishop, and Commissioner, he breaks the living into little pieces as a Commissioner, and after it is rejected in its impoverished state by the Chapter, he gives it away as Bishop of the diocese. The only answer that is given to such objections is, the *impeccability of Bishops* ; and upon this prin-

ciple the whole bill has been constructed, and here is the great mistake about Bishops. They are upon the whole very good, and worthy men ; but they are not (as many ancient ladies suppose) wholly exempt from human infirmities ; they have their malice, hatred, uncharitableness, persecution, and interests like other men ; and an administration who did not think it more magnificent to laugh at the lower Clergy, than to protect them, should suffer no Ecclesiastical Bill to pass through Parliament without seriously considering how its provisions may affect the happiness of poor Clergymen pushed into living-tombs, and pining in solitude—

Vates procul atque in sola relegant

Pascua, post montem oppositum, et trans flumina lata.

There is a practice among some Bishops, which may as well be mentioned here as any where else, but which I think cannot be too severely reprobated. They send for a Clergyman, and insist upon his giving evidence respecting the character, and conduct of his neighbour. Does he hunt ? Does he shoot ? Is he in debt ? Is he temperate ? Does he attend to his parish ? &c. &c. Now what is this, but to destroy for all Clergymen the very elements of social life—to put an end to all confidence between man, and man—and to disseminate among gentlemen, who are bound to live in concord, every feeling of resentment, hatred, and suspicion ? but the very essence of tyranny is to act, as if the finer feelings, like the finer dishes,

were delicacies only for the rich and great, and that little people have no taste for them and no right to them. A good and honest Bishop (I thank God there are many who deserve that character !) ought to suspect himself, and carefully to watch his own heart. He is all of a sudden elevated from being a tutor, dining at an early hour with his pupil, (and occasionally, it is believed, on cold meat) to be a spiritual Lord ; he is dressed in a magnificent dress, decorated with a title, flattered by Chaplains, and surrounded by little people looking up for the things which he has to give away ; and this often happens to a man who has had no opportunities of seeing the world, whose parents were in very humble life, and who has given up all his thoughts to the Frogs of Aristophanes and the Targum of Onkelos. How is it possible that such a man should not lose his head ? that he should not swell ? that he should not be guilty of a thousand follies, and worry and tease to death (before he recovers his common sense) an hundred men as good, and as wise, and as able as himself ?

The history of the division of Edmonton has, I understand, been repeatedly stated in the Commission—and told as it has been by a decided advocate, and with no sort of evidence called for on the other side of the question, has produced an unfair impression against Chapters. The history is shortly this :—Besides the Mother Church of Edmonton, there are two Chapels—Southgate,

and Winchmore Hill Chapel. Winchmore Hill Chapel was built by the Society for building Churches upon the same plan as the portions of Marylebone are arranged ; the Clergyman was to be remunerated by the lease of the pews, and if curates with talents for preaching had been placed there, they might have gained £200 per annum. Though men of perfectly respectable, and honourable character, they were not endowed with this sort of talent, and they gained no more than from £90 to £100 per annum. The Bishop of London applied to the Cathedral of St. Paul's, to consent that £250 per annum, in addition to the proceeds from the letting of the pews, or that proportion of the whole of the value of the living, should be allotted to the chapel of Winchmore : and at the same time we received an application from the chapel at Southgate, that another considerable portion, I forget what, but believe it to have been rather less (perhaps £200) should be allotted to them, and the whole living severed into three parishes. Now the living of Edmonton is about* £1350 per annum, besides surplice fees, but this £1350 depends upon a Corn Rent of 10s. 3d. per bushel, present valuation, which at the next valuation would, in the opinion of eminent land surveyors whom we consulted, be reduced to about 6s. per bushel, so that the living, considering the reduction also of all voluntary offerings to the Church, would be reduced one-half, and this half was to be divided into three,

* I have not the documents with me, and write from recollection.

and one or two Curates (two Curates by the present Bill) to be kept by the Vicar of the old Church; and thus three clerical beggars were, by the activity of the Bishop of London, to be established in a district where the extreme dearness of all provisions is the plea for making the See of London double in value to that of any Bishopric in the country. To this we declined to agree; and this, heard only on one side, has most probably been the parent of the clause in question. The right cure for this and all similar cases would be, to give the Bishop a power of allotting to such Chapels, as high a salary as to any other Curate in the diocese, taking, as part of that salary, whatever was received from the lease of the pews, and to this no reasonable man could or would object: but this is not enough—all must bow to one man—“Chapters must be taught submission. No pamphlets, no meeting of independent Prebendaries, to remonstrate against the proceedings of their superiors—no opulence and ease but mine.”

Some effect was produced also upon the Commission, by the evidence of a prelate who is both Dean and Bishop,* and who gave it as his opinion, that the patronage of Bishops was given upon better principles than that of Chapters, which, translated into fair English, is no more than this—that the said witness, not meaning to mislead, but himself deceived, has his own way entirely in his

* This Prelate stated it as his opinion, to the Commission, that in future all Prelates ought to declare that they held their patronage intrust for the public.

diocese, and can only have it partially in his chapter.

There is a rumour that these reasonings, with which they were assailed from so many quarters in the last Session of Parliament, have not been without their effect, and that it is the intention of the Commissioners only to take away the patronage from the Cathedrals exactly in proportion as the numbers of their Members are reduced. Such may be the intention of the Commissioners; but as that intention has not been publicly notified, it depends only upon report; and the Commissioners have changed their minds so often, that they may alter their intentions twenty times again before the meeting of Parliament. The whole of my observations in this letter are grounded upon their *bills of last year*—which Lord John Russell stated his intention of re-introducing at the beginning of this Session. If they have any new plans, they ought to have published them three months ago—and to have given to the Clergy an ample opportunity of considering them: but this they take the greatest care never to do. The policy of the Government and of the Commissioners is, to hurry their Bills through with such rapidity, that very little time is given to those who suffer by them for consideration and remonstrance, and we must be prepared for the worst beforehand. You are cashiered and confiscated before you can look about you—if you leave home for six weeks, in these times,

you find a Commissioner in possession of your house and office.

A report has reached my ears, that though all other Cathedrals are to retain patronage exactly equal to their reduced numbers, a separate measure of justice is to be used for St. Paul's; that our numbers are to be augmented by a fifth; and our patronage reduced by a third; and this immediately on the passing of the Bill. That the Bishop of Exeter, for instance, is to receive his augmentation of patronage only in proportion as the Prebendaries die off, and the Prebendaries themselves will, as long as they live, remain in the same proportional state as to patronage; and that when they are reduced to four (their stationary number), they will retain one-third of all the patronage the twelve now possess. Whether this is wise or not, is a separate question, but at least it is just; the four who remain cannot with any colour of justice complain that they do not retain all the patronage which was divided among twelve; but at St. Paul's, not only are our numbers to be augmented by a fifth, but the patronage of fifteen of our best livings is to be instantly conferred upon the Bishop of London. This little *episode of plunder* involves three separate acts of gross injustice: in the first place, if only our numbers had been augmented by a fifth (in itself a mere bonus to Commissioners), our patronage would have been reduced one-fifth in value. Secondly, one-third of

the preferment is to be taken away immediately; and these two added together make eight-fifteenths, or more than one-half of our whole patronage. So that when all the Cathedrals are reduced to their reformed numbers, each Cathedral will enjoy precisely the same proportion of patronage as it now does, and each member of every other Cathedral will have precisely the same means of promoting men of merit or men of his own family, as is now possessed; while less than half of these advantages will remain to St. Paul's. Thirdly, if the Bishop of London were to wait (as all the other Bishops by this arrangement must wait) till the present Patrons die off, the injustice would be to the future body; but by this scheme, every present Incumbent of St. Paul's is instantly deprived of eight-fifteenths of his patronage; while every other member of every other Cathedral (as far as patronage is concerned) remains precisely in the same state in which he was before. Why this blow is levelled against St. Paul's I cannot conceive; still less can I imagine why the Bishop of London is not to wait, as all other Bishops are forced to wait, for the death of the present Patrons. There is a reason, indeed, for not waiting, by which (had I to do with a person of less elevated character than the Bishop of London) I would endeavour to explain this precipitate seizure of patronage—and that is, that the livings assigned to him in this remarkable scheme are all very valuable, and the

incumbents all very old. But I shall pass over this scheme as a mere supposition, invented to bring the Commission into disrepute, a scheme to which it is utterly impossible the Commissioners should ever affix their names.

I should have thought, if the love of what is just had not excited the Commissioner Bishops, that the ridicule of men voting such comfortable things to themselves as the Prebendal patronage would have alarmed them; but they want to sacrifice with other men's hecatombs, and to enjoy, at the same time, the character of great disinterestedness, and the luxury of unjust spoliation. It was thought necessary to make a fund; and the prebends in the gift of the Bishops* were appropriated to that purpose. The Bishops who consented to this have then made a great sacrifice—true, but they have taken more out of our pockets than they have disbursed from their own; where then is the sacrifice? they must either give back the patronage or the martyrdom; if they choose to be martyrs—which I hope they will do—let them give us back our patronage: if they prefer the patronage, they must not talk of being martyrs

* The Bishops have, however, secured for themselves all the Livings which were in the separate gifts of Prebendaries and Deans, and they have received from the Crown a very large contribution of valuable patronage; why or wherefore, is known only to the unfathomable wisdom of ministers. The glory of martyrdom can be confined only at best to the Bishops of the old Cathedrals, for there are scarcely any separate Prebends in the new Cathedrals.

—they cannot effect this double sensuality and combine the sweet flavour of rapine with the aromatic odour of sanctity.

We are told, if you agitate these questions among yourselves, you will have the democratic Philistines come down upon you, and sweep you all away together. Be it so ; I am quite ready to be swept away when the time comes. Every body has their favourite death : some delight in apoplexy, and others prefer marasmus. I would infinitely rather be crushed by democrats, than, under the plea of the public good, be mildly, and blandly absorbed by Bishops.

I met the other day in an old Dutch Chronicle, with a passage so apposite to this subject, that though it is somewhat too light for the occasion I cannot abstain from quoting it. There was a great meeting of all the Clergy at Dordrecht, and the Chronicler thus describes it, which I give in the language of the translation :—“ And there was great store of Bishops in the town, in their robes goodly to behold, and all the great men of the State were there, and folks poured in in boats on the Mense, the Merve, the Rhine, and the Linge, coming from the Isle of Beverlandt and Isselmond, and from all quarters in the Bailiwick of Dort ; Arminians and Gomarists, with the friends of John Barneveldt and of Hugh Grote. And before my Lords the Bishops, Simon of Gloucester, who was a Bishop in those parts, disputed with Vorstius, and Leoline the Monk, and many texts of scripture were bauldied to and fro ; and when this

was done, and many propositions made, and it waxed towards twelve of the clock, my Lords the Bishops prepared to set them down to a fair repast, in which was great store of good things—and among the rest a roasted peacock, having in lieu of a tail, the arms, and banners of the Archbishop, which was a goodly sight to all who favoured the Church—and then the Archbishop would say a grace, as was seemly to do, he being a very holy man; but ere he had finished, a great mob of townspeople and folks from the country, who were gathered under the window, cried out *bread! bread!* for there was a great famine, and wheat had risen to three times the ordinary price of the *sleich*;* and when they had done crying *bread! bread!* they called out *no Bishops*—and began to cast up stones at the windows. Whereat my Lords the Bishops were in a great fright, and cast their dinner out of the window to appease the mob, and so the men of that town were well pleased, and did devour the meats with a great appetite; and then you might have seen my Lords standing with empty plates, and looking wistfully at each other, till Simon of Gloucester, he who disputed with Leoline the monk, stood up among them and said, ‘*Good, my Lords, is it your pleasure to stand here fasting, and that those who count lower in the Church than you do, should feast and fluster? Let us order to us the dinner of the Deans and Canons, which is making ready for them in*

* A measure in the Bailiwick of Dort, containing two gallons one pint English dry measure.

the chamber below.' And this speech of Simon of Gloucester pleased the Bishops much; and so they sent for the host, one William of Ypres, and told him it was for the public good, and he, much fearing the Bishops, brought them the dinner of the Deans and Canons; and so the Deans and Canons went away without dinner, and were pelted by the men of the town, because they had not put any meat out of the window like the Bishops; and when the Count came to hear of it, he said it was a pleasant conceit, *and that the Bishops were right cunning men, and had ding'd the Canons well.*"

When I talk of sacrifices, I mean the sacrifices of the Bishop Commissioners, for we are given to understand that the great mass of Bishops were never consulted at all about these proceedings; that they are contrary to every thing which consultations at Lambeth, previous to the Commission, had led them to expect; and that they are totally disapproved of by them. The voluntary sacrifice then (for it is no sacrifice if it is not voluntary) is in the Bishop Commissioners only; and besides the indemnification which they have voted to themselves out of the patronage of the Cathedrals, they will have all that never-ending patronage which is to proceed from the working of the Commission, and the endowments bestowed upon different livings. So much for episcopal sacrifices!

And who does not see the end and meaning of all this? The Lay Commissioners, who are members of the Government, cannot and will not attend—the Archbishops of York and Canterbury

are quiet and amiable men, going fast down in the vale of life—some of the members of the Commission are expletives—some must be absent in their dioceses—the Bishop of London is passionately fond of labour, has certainly no aversion to power, is of quick temper, great ability, thoroughly versant in ecclesiastical law, and always in London. He will become the Commission; and when the Church of England is mentioned, it will only mean *Charles James, of London*, who will enjoy a greater power than has ever been possessed by any Churchman since the days of Laud, and will become the *Church of England here upon earth*. As for the Commission itself, there is scarcely any power which is not given to it. They may call for every paper in the world, and every human creature who possesses it; and do what they like to one or the other. It is hopeless to contend with such a body; and most painful to think that it has been established under a Whig Government*. A Commission of Tory Churchmen, established for such purposes, should have been framed with the utmost jealousy, and with the most cautious circumscription of its powers, and with the most earnest wish for its extinction when the purposes of its creation were answered. The Government have done every thing in their power to make it vexatious, omnipotent, and everlasting. This immense power,

* I am speaking here of the permanent Commission established by Act of Parliament in 1835. The Commission for reporting, had come to an end six months before this letter was written.

flung into the hands of an individual, is one of the many foolish consequences which proceed from the centralization of the Bill, and the unwillingness to employ the local knowledge of the Bishops in the process of annexing dignified to parochial preferment.

There is a third Bill concocted by the Commission-Bishops, in which the great principle of increasing the power of the Bench has certainly not been lost sight of. ———, a brother Clergyman, falls ill suddenly in the country, and he begs his clerical neighbour to do duty for him in the afternoon, thinking it better that there should be single service in two Churches, than two services in one, and none in the other. The Clergyman who accedes to this request is liable to a penalty of £5. There is an harshness, and ill nature in this—a gross ignorance of the state of the poorer Clergy—an hard-heartedness produced by the long enjoyment of wealth and power, which makes it quite intolerable. I speak of it as it stands in the Bill of last year.

If a Clergyman has a living of £400 per annum, and a population of two thousand persons, the Bishop can compel him to keep a Curate, to whom he can allot any salary which he may allot to any other Curate; in other words, he may take away half the income of the Clergyman, and instantly ruin him—and this without any complaint from the Vestry; with every testimonial of the most perfect satisfaction of the Parish in the labours of a Minister, who may perhaps be dedicating his whole

life to their improvement. I think I remember that the Bishop of London once attempted this before he was a Commissioner, and was defeated. I had no manner of doubt that it would speedily become the Law after the Commission had begun to operate. The Bishop of London is said to have declared, after this trial, that *if it was not Law it should soon be Law*:* and *Law* you will see it will become. In fact, he can slip into any Ecclesiastical Act of Parliament anything he pleases. There is nobody to heed, or to contradict him; provided the power of Bishops is extended by it, no Bishop is so ungenteel as to oppose the Act of his Right Reverend Brother; and there are not many men who have knowledge, eloquence, or force of character to stand up against the Bishop of London, and, above all, of industry to watch him. The Ministry, and the Lay Lords, and the House of Commons, care nothing about the matter; and the Clergy themselves, in a state of the greatest ignorance as to what is passing in the world, find their chains heavier, and heavier, without knowing who or what has produced the additional incumbrance. A good honest Whig minister should have two or three stout-hearted parish priests in his train to watch the Bishops' bills, and to see that they were constructed on other principles than that *Bishops*

* The Bishop of London denies that he ever said this; but the Bishop of London affects short sharp sayings, seasoned, I am afraid, sometimes with a little indiscretion; and these sayings are not necessarily forgotten because he forgets them.

can do no wrong, and cannot have too much power.

The Whigs do nothing of this, and yet they complain that they are hated by the clergy, and that in all elections the Clergy are their bitterest enemies. Suppose they were to try a little justice, a little notice, and a little protection. It would take more time than quizzing, and contempt, but it might do some good.

The Bishop puts a great number of questions to his clergy, which they are to be compelled, by this new law of the Commission, to answer, under a penalty, and if they do answer them, they incur, perhaps a still heavier penalty. "Have you had two services in your Church all the year?" "I decline to answer." "Then I fine you £20." "I have only had one service." "Then I fine you £250." In what other profession are men placed between this double fire of penalties, and compelled to criminate themselves? It has been disused in England, I believe, ever since the time of Laud and the Star Chamber.

By the same Bill, as it first emanated from the Commission, a Bishop could compel a clergyman to expend three years' income upon a house in which he had resided perhaps fifty years, and in which he had brought up a large family. With great difficulty, some slight modification of this enormous power was obtained, and it was a little improved in the amended Bill*. In the same way an attempt was

* I perceive, that the Archbishop of Canterbury borrows money for the improvement of his palace, and pays the principal

made to try delinquent clergymen, by a jury of clergymen, nominated by the Bishop, but this was too bad, and was not endured for an instant ; still it showed the same love of power and the same principle of *impeccability*, for the Bill is expressly confined to all suits and complaints against persons *below the dignity and degree of Bishops*. The truth is, that there are very few men in either House of Parliament (ministers, or any one else), who ever think of the happiness and comfort of the working clergy, or bestow one thought upon guarding them from the increased, and increasing power of their encroaching masters. What is called taking care of the Church is taking care of the Bishops ; and all Bills for the management of the clergy are left to the concoction of men who very naturally believe that they are improving the Church when they are increasing their own power. There are many Bishops too generous, too humane, and too christian,

off in forty years. This is quite as soon as a debt incurred for such public purposes ought to be paid off, and the Archbishop has done rightly to take that period. In process of time I think it very likely that this indulgence will be extended to country clergymen, who are compelled to pay off the debts for buildings, (which they are compelled to undertake) in twenty years ; and by the new Bill, not yet passed, this indulgence is extended to thirty years. Why poor Clergymen have been compelled for the last five years to pay off the incumbrances at the rate of one-twentieth per annum, and are now compelled to pay them off, or will when the Bill passes be so compelled, at the rate of one-thirtieth per annum, when the Archbishop takes forty years to do the same thing, and has made that bargain in the year 1831, I really cannot tell. A Clergyman who does not reside, is forced to pay off his building debt in ten years.

to oppress a poor clergyman ; but I have seen (I am sorry to say) many grievous instances of partiality, rudeness, and oppression. I have seen clergymen treated by Bishops with a violence, and contempt which the lowest servant in the Bishop's establishment would not have endured for a single moment ; and if there is a helpless, friendless, wretched being in the community, it is a poor clergyman in the country with a large family. If there is an object of compassion, he is one. If there is any occasion in life where a great man should lay aside his office, and put on those kind looks, and use those kind words which raise the humble from the dust, these are the occasions when those best parts of the christian character ought to be displayed.

I would instance the unlimited power which a Bishop possesses over a Curate, as a very unfair degree of power for any man to possess. Take the following dialogue which represents a real event.

Bishop—Sir, I understand you frequent the Meetings of the Bible Society.

Curate—Yes, my Lord, I do.

Bishop—Sir, I tell you plainly, if you continue to do so, I shall silence you from preaching in my diocese.

Curate—My Lord, I am very sorry to incur your indignation, but I frequent that Society upon principle, because I think it eminently serviceable to the cause of the Gospel.

Bishop—Sir, I do not enter into your reasons, but tell you plainly, if you continue to go there you shall be silenced.

The young man did go and was silenced—and as Bishops have always a great deal of clever machinery at work of testimonials and *bene-decessits*, and always a Lawyer at their elbow, under the name of a secretary, a Curate excluded from one diocese is excluded from all. His remedy is an appeal to the Archbishop from the Bishop; his worldly goods however amount to ten pounds; he never was in London; he dreads such a tribunal as an Archbishop—he thinks perhaps in time the Bishop may be softened—if he is compelled to restore him, the enmity will be immortal. It would be just as rational to give to a frog or a rabbit, upon which the Physician is about to experiment, an appeal to the Zoological Society, as to give to a country Curate an appeal to the Archbishop against his purple oppressor.

The errors of the Bill are a public concern—the injustice of the Bill is a private concern. Give us our patronage for life. Treat the Cathedrals all alike, with the same measure of justice. Don't divide livings in the patronage of present Incumbents without their consent—or do the same with all livings. If these points are attended to in the forthcoming Bill, *all complaint of unfairness and injustice will be at an end*. I shall still think, that the Commissioners have been very rash and indiscreet, that they have evinced a contempt for existing institutions, and a spirit of destruction

which will be copied to the life hereafter, by Commissioners of a very different description. Bishops live in high places with high people, or with little people who depend upon them. They walk delicately, like Agag. They hear only one sort of conversation, and avoid bold reckless men, as a lady veils herself from rough breezes. I am half inclined to think sometimes, that the Bishop-Commissioners really think that they are finally settling the Church; that the House of Lords will be open to the Bench for ages; and that many Archbishops in succession will enjoy their fifteen thousand pounds a year in Lambeth. I wish I could do for the Bishop-Commissioners what his mother did for Æneas, in the last days of Troy :—

“ Oninem quæ nunc obducta tuenti
Mortales hebetat visus tibi, et humida circum
Caligat, nubem eripiam.
Apparent diræ facies, &c. &c.

It is ominous for liberty, when Sydney and Russell cannot agree : but when Lord John Russell, in the House of Commons, said, that we showed no disposition to make any sacrifices for the good of the Church; I took the liberty to remind that excellent person that he must first of all prove it to be for the good of the Church that our patronage should be taken away by the Bishops, and then he might find fault with us, for not consenting to the sacrifice.

I have little or no personal nor pecuniary interest in these things, and have made all possible exertion

(as two or three persons in power well know) that they should not come before the public.* I have no son nor son-in-law in the Church, for whom I want any patronage. If I were young enough to survive any incumbent of St. Paul's, my own preferment is too agreeably circumstanced to make it at all probable I should avail myself of the opportunity. I am a sincere advocate for Church Reform ; but I think it very possible, and even very easy, to have removed all odium from the Establishment in a much less violent, and revolutionary manner, without committing or attempting such flagrant acts of injustice, and without leaving behind an odious Court of Inquisition, which will inevitably fall into the hands of a single individual, and will be an eternal source of vexation, jealousy, and change. I give sincere credit to the Commissioners for good intentions—how can such men have intended any thing but good? And I firmly believe that they are hardly conscious of the extraordinary predilection they have shown for Bishops in all their proceedings ; it is like those errors in tradesmen's bills of which the retail arithmetician is really unconscious, but which somehow or another always happen to be in his own favour. Such men as the Commissioners do not say this patronage belongs justly to the Cathedrals, and we will take it away unjustly for ourselves ; but after the manner of human nature a thousand weak reasons prevail,

* I went on plaguing and remonstrating, till the great man said to me, " You had far better leave us alone, and publish your thoughts upon the subject."

which would have no effect, if self-interest were not concerned ; they are practising a deception on themselves and sincerely believe they are doing right. When I talk of spoil and plunder, I do not speak of the intention, but of the effect, and the precedent.

Still the Commissioners are on the eve of entailing an immense evil upon the country, and unfortunately they have gone so far, that it is necessary they should ruin the Cathedrals, to preserve their character for consistency. They themselves have been frightened a great deal too much by the mob ; have overlooked the chances in their favour produced by delay ; have been afraid of being suspected (as Tories) of not doing enough ; and have allowed themselves to be hurried on by the constitutional impetuosity of one man, who cannot be brought to believe that wisdom often consists in leaving alone, standing still, and doing nothing. From the joint operation of all these causes, all the Cathedrals of England will in a few weeks be knocked about our ears. You, Mr. Archdeacon Singleton, will sit like Caius Marius on the ruins, and we shall lose for ever the wisest scheme for securing a well educated Clergy upon the most economical terms, and for preventing that low fanaticism which is the greatest curse upon human happiness, and the greatest enemy of true religion. We shall have all the evils of an establishment, and none of its good.

You tell me I shall be laughed at as a rich and overgrown Churchman ; be it so. I have

been laughed at a hundred times in my life, and care little or nothing about it. If I am well provided for now—I have had my full share of the blanks in the lottery as well as the prizes. Till thirty years of age I never received a farthing from the Church, then £50 per annum for two years—then nothing for ten years—then £500 per annum, increased for two or three years to £800, till, in my grand climacteric I was made Canon of St. Paul's ; and before that period, I had built a Parsonage-house with farm offices for a large farm, which cost me £4,000, and had reclaimed another from ruins at the expense of £2,000. A Lawyer, or a Physician in good practice would smile at this picture of great Ecclesiastical wealth ; and yet I am considered as a perfect monster of ecclesiastical prosperity.

I should be very sorry to give offence to the dignified Ecclesiastics who are in the Commission ; I hope they will allow for the provocation, if I have been a little too warm in the defence of St. Paul's, which I have taken a solemn oath to defend. I was at school and college with the Archbishop of Canterbury ; fifty-three years ago he knocked me down with the chess-board for checkmating him—and now he is attempting to take away my patronage. I believe these are the only two acts of violence he ever committed in his life : the interval has been one of gentleness, kindness, and the most amiable and high-principled courtesy to his clergy. For the Archbishop of York, I feel an affectionate re-

spect—the result of that invariable kindness I have received from him : and who can see the Bishop of London without admiring his superior talents—being pleased with his society—without admitting that, *upon the whole*, the public is benefited by his ungovernable passion for business ; and without receiving the constant workings of a really good heart, as an atonement for the occasional excesses of an impetuous disposition ? I am quite sure if the tables had been turned, and if it had been his lot, as a Canon, to fight against the encroachments of Bishops, that he would have made as stout a defence as I have done—the only difference is, that he would have done it with much greater talent.

As for my friends the Whigs, I neither wish to offend them, nor any body else. I consider myself to be as good a Whig as any amongst them. I was a Whig before many of them were born—and while some of them were Tories, and Waverers. I have always turned out to fight their battles, and when I saw no other Clergyman turn out but myself—and this in times before liberality was well recompensed, and therefore in fashion, and when the smallest appearance of it seemed to condemn a Churchman to the grossest obloquy, and the most hopeless poverty. It may suit the purpose of the Ministers to flatter the Bench : it does not suit mine. I do not choose in my old age to be tossed as a prey to the Bishops ; I have not deserved this of my Whig friends. I know very well there can

be no justice for Deans and Chapters, and that the momentary Lords of the earth will receive our statement with derision and *Persiflage*—the great principle which is now called in for the government of mankind. Nobody admires the general conduct of the Whig Administration more than I do. They have conferred, in their domestic policy, the most striking benefits on the country. To say that there is no risk in what they have done is mere nonsense—there is great risk; and all honest men must balance to counteract it—holding back as firmly down hill as they pulled vigorously up hill. Still, great as the risk is, it was worth while to incur it in the Poor Law Bill, in the Tithe Bill, in the Corporation Bill, and in the circumscription of the Irish Protestant Church. In all these matters, the Whig Ministry, after the heat of party is over, and when Joseph Hume, and Wilson Croker are powdered into the dust of death, will gain great, and deserved fame. In the question of the Church Commission they have behaved with the grossest injustice; delighted to see this temporary delirium of Archbishops, and Bishops, scarcely believing their eyes, and carefully suppressing their laughter, when they saw these eminent Conservatives laying about them with the fury of Mr. Tyler or Mr. Straw; they have taken the greatest care not to disturb them, and to give them no offence: “Do as you like, my lords, with the Chapters and the Parochial Clergy; you will find some pleasing morsels in the ruins of the

Cathedrals. Keep for yourselves any thing you like—whatever is agreeable to you cannot be unpleasant to us.” In the mean time, the old friends of, and the old sufferers for, liberty, do not understand this new meanness, and are not a little astonished to find their leaders prostrate on their knees before the Lords of the Church, and to receive no other answer from them than that, if they are disturbed in their adulation, they will immediately resign !

I remain,

My dear SIR,

With sincere good will and respect,

Your's,

SYDNEY SMITH.

THE END.

Los Angeles

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